

2020's most important human evolution discoveries

Since many scientific articles are years in the making, a lot of exciting discoveries were still revealed in 2020!

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No list of important finds in human evolution would be complete without fossil evidence of hominins themselves, and this year the site of Drimolen in South Africa was the big winner. First, in April, a team led by Andy I. R. Herries from La Trobe University announced new fossils of both *Paranthropus robustus* (DNH 152) and *Homo erectus* (DNH 134) dating to between ~2.04 and 1.95 million years ago, making these the [oldest fossils of both of these hominin species](#). These finds demonstrate the [contemporaneity of these two species at this site with *Australopithecus africanus*](#) and DNH 134 pushes back the origin of *Homo erectus* by about 150,000 – 200,000 years.

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A team led by Dongju Zhang from Lanzhou University wanted to test the hypothesis that a ~160,000 year old partial jawbone found by a Buddhist monk in Baishiya Karst Cave might be the remains of a Denisovan... They agreed to excavate only in winter and at night, in sub-zero temperatures, to avoid disturbing worshippers – and were rewarded by [Denisovan mitochondrial DNA from the cave sediments](#), dated to between 100,000 – 60,000 years ago, and possibly as recently as 45,000 years ago.

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